

# **Executive Summary**

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## **Teacher Certification Program Implementation**

The Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee authorized a study of Connecticut's teacher certification program implementation in April 2008. The program's overall purpose is to ensure public school teachers are teaching in accordance with the certification standards and requirements approved by the State Board of Education. The study is the last part of a two-phase study of teacher certification in Connecticut. The committee completed its first phase – a review of the Beginning Educator Support and Training program – last year (2007).

This study mainly focused on the operations within the State Department of Education's Teacher Certification Unit, assessing whether the unit's administration of the certification system is efficient and responsive to teachers and other customers served. Other areas for analysis outlined in the study scope included: current certification requirements for experienced teachers, including changes over time and current efforts to revise the requirements; the department's organization and resources to fulfill its role in the teacher certification process; SDE's efforts to implement and consistently apply teacher certification requirements; reciprocity with other states for certification purposes; continuing education requirements for teachers and SDE's current effort to modify the requirements; and the process used to ensure school districts comply with the state's certification requirements for educators.

Feedback from a variety of constituencies, including information presented at the committee's public hearing on this topic, was collected during the study. Careful consideration was given to the comments, concerns, and ideas expressed through interviews, surveys, and testimony received as this set of findings and recommendations was developed. The report's key findings are summarized below, and the committee's full recommendations also are provided.

## **Teacher Certification Requirements**

The State Department of Education made a major attempt to revamp its certification requirements for teachers in the late 1990s. The effort changed certification regulations as a way to ensure classroom teachers were qualified to meet the learning needs of an increasingly diverse student population. In 2003, however, the legislature – acting on the State Board of Education's request – postponed the regulations prior to the implementation date, and the regulations were subsequently repealed through the regulations review process.

A second attempt to overhaul the certification regulations is underway now, with changes based, in part, on federal requirements and the needs of Connecticut's students and teachers. The education department has been shaping and attempting to build support for major changes to the certification structure and endorsement requirements over the past four years.

The department is trying to implement certification requirements it believes will ensure teachers are prepared to teach the wide range of student learners in schools across the state. Chief among this report's analysis of those changes is the process SDE has used to develop the

proposed changes, circulate information about the changes among stakeholders, and garner support for the changes in an effort to avoid a result similar to when the last major attempt to change teacher certification regulations occurred. The department appears to have made a more proactive effort to receive input from education constituencies, compared to the last time certification revisions were considered.

The report further examines the state's current teacher certification requirements as well as the potential changes, and focuses on whether those requirements have been associated with higher student achievement by education researchers. Researchers agree that a few key aspects of teacher preparation required or being considered by Connecticut generally do not positively impact student learning. In those cases, the committee recommends the education department re-examine the requirements or proposals, in light of the research and teacher shortages.

One key area of the current requirements where there seems to be wide consensus among education constituencies in Connecticut – including many within SDE – is that continuing education for teachers is not effective in some districts. A series of recommendations are made to shift Connecticut's education community from a continuing education coursework model to more meaningful professional development with the clear, overarching goal of improving teacher quality and student achievement.

### **Compliance with Certification Requirements**

The total number of employed educators found lacking proper certification at the end of the last three school years is minimal in relation to the total number of educators certified in the state during those years. However, the potential number of students taught daily by teachers who are not appropriately certified in Connecticut could be several thousand.

Formal communication from the SDE commissioner to school districts regarding certification compliance issues does not occur until near the end of the school year, meaning districts technically have a full school year to submit their required compliance information to SDE. Therefore, teachers not appropriately certified may remain teaching for many months during a school year, if not an entire school year, under the department's current compliance process. The State Board of Education has not addressed the issue of compliance and does not use its statutory authority to require school districts to comply with state educator certification requirements.

### **Certification Unit Operations**

The report finds the operations within the certification unit to process and review certification applications mostly effective and efficient. Analysis of certification processing was limited to a degree because many of the current processing procedures will change or become obsolete when the department implements its new web-based certification system anticipated in early 2009. The new system is designed to improve the certification process for educators and enhance the performance of the certification unit. However, increased checks on whether applications are properly evaluated are needed. The study makes findings and recommendations to increase the level of management oversight of the unit, track the quality and quantity of

teachers' professional development activities, and provide oversight of the continuing education audit process.

### **Management Oversight**

There is little oversight conducted of certification output and staff at the unit level, and none at the broader division level within the department. At the unit level, the quantity of certifications, permits, and authorizations produced per analyst seems to be one of the only outcomes that is consistently measured and reviewed. Other key aspects of performance are not formally assessed, including the quality of application reviews and the quality and quantity of continuing education unit audits.

### **Customer Service**

The certification unit received high marks from educators and school districts for the unit's services and information provided to customers, as determined by two surveys conducted by committee staff. Districts tended to give more favorable ratings than educators across four key customer service components. Roughly 90 percent of responding districts and 80 percent of responding educators were satisfied with the unit's overall services. The committee believes the unit should strive further to ensure its customers continue to receive prompt, thorough, and complete service and information.

### **Committee Recommendations**

- 1. The State Department of Education should consider providing the resources necessary to give the certification unit manager the ability to monitor certification analysts' workloads using the new certification system.**
- 2. The State Department of Education's certification unit management should periodically review application materials and the certification decisions made by analysts, to ensure applications are being properly processed.**
- 3. The State Department of Education should change its transcript review policies by reviewing the coursework of 25 percent of graduates (with at least one review of a candidate from each endorsement area) for Connecticut educator preparation programs that will be undergoing state accreditation review or are on accreditation probation, and expanding the review to include all graduates if any problems are found. At the same time, the current policy of reviewing the coursework of about 10 percent of all Connecticut educator preparation programs' graduates should remain unchanged.**
- 4. C.G.S. Sec. 10-145b(m) shall be amended to require local and regional boards of education to report to the Commissioner of Education the name of any certified employee dismissed for misconduct.**

5. The State Department of Education should use the new certification system's CEU-related abilities to implement oversight of CEU audits by tracking the quantity of the audits and conducting occasional checks of the audit quality.
6. The State Department of Education should periodically remind districts that Connecticut law requires professional development offerings be developed with the input of teachers.
7. The State Department of Education should more effectively oversee certification at both the unit and division levels. This includes developing performance measures and objectives of key functions within the unit and monitoring the unit's performance based on those measures and objectives.
8. The State Department of Education's certification unit, as part of its management oversight process, should periodically elicit feedback from its customers to determine satisfaction with: 1) the unit's timeliness in responding to calls and e-mail, and in processing certification applications; and 2) the overall thoroughness and completeness of the information provided to educators, districts, and the general public. The techniques used to receive such feedback should be determined by the certification unit.
9. The State Department of Education should implement an on site monitoring program as part of its overall system of ensuring school districts and educators fully comply with the state's certification requirements. Spot audits of a random sample of districts should be made annually, with an audit of each district in Connecticut occurring at least once every five years. More frequent audits of districts with substantial or perennial problems should be made. As part of any on site compliance audit, the department should offer districts technical assistance and support to improve districts' overall efforts to comply with state educator certification requirements and the ability of internal systems within districts to produce accurate, timely, and complete compliance information. The department should determine the extent of the new on site inspection program and seek additional resources commensurate with the new monitoring efforts.
10. The State Board of Education should make compliance with state certification standards among school districts more of a priority at the board level. The board should take a more proactive approach to ensuring school districts and educators fully comply with the state's certification standards on a regular basis, including publically releasing the names of school districts in non-compliance and applying the board's authority in accordance with C.G.S. Sec. 10-145(b) when necessary.
11. The only formal notification from the state education department to school district superintendents and local/regional boards of education chairpersons should come directly from the commissioner within five business days of when a district does not submit the required compliance information upon first request. If the necessary information regarding the corrective actions taken by a district is not received

within 10 business days of receipt of the commissioner's letter, the matter should be forwarded to the State Board of Education for action. The state education board, or a designated committee thereof, should begin the process of enforcing compliance in accordance with the board's statutory authority.

12. The State Department of Education and the Teachers' Retirement Board should determine by February 1, 2009, the most effective process between the two agencies for ensuring teachers are provided proper retirement credit based on their state certification status. SDE should begin sending information to TRB on teachers not properly certified as soon as it becomes available through the annual compliance report generated by the education department.
13. The State Department of Education should ensure its new automated certification system will have the full capacity to allow the department to monitor school districts' compliance with state certification requirements for educators throughout the year instead of the current process, which is based on a one-time compliance report generated annually.
14. The State Department of Education should continue to involve all pertinent stakeholders as changes in regulations are put forth, allow more discourse for understanding to be reached when there is disagreement over a particular proposal, and adjust its certification proposals when necessary to advance the state's educational goals, including improved student achievement.
15. The State Department of Education should consider whether to expand coursework reciprocity to graduates of NCATE-accredited teacher preparation programs and to graduates of alternate route programs in NASDTEC interstate agreement states.
16. The State Department of Education should consider accepting within its current certification proposals related majors in both teacher shortage subject areas and non-shortage areas, leaving in place the subject knowledge test requirement (Praxis II or foreign language test).
17. The State Department of Education should consider whether an interdisciplinary major should be required for elementary education teachers, rather than giving those teachers a choice between a subject major and an interdisciplinary major.
18. The State Department of Education should consider whether the precise or related major requirement should be changed to a moderate content area coursework requirement, leaving in place the subject knowledge test requirement.
19. The State Department of Education should reconsider requiring the coursework to move to professional certification be at the graduate level. The department also should consider whether 30 credits beyond the bachelor's degree should be required for certification purposes.

- 20. The State Department of Education should seek and use input from Connecticut's education stakeholders in considering whether the recommendations regarding teacher coursework requirements should be adopted.**
- 21. C.G.S. Sec. 10-145b(l)(1) shall be amended to require each teacher holding the state's highest-level certification shows the teacher has engaged in meaningful professional development over the duration of the highest-level certificate. The teacher must demonstrate, in a format and in accordance with standards and guidelines developed by the State Department of Education, that each professional development effort was: 1) substantial in duration; 2) connected to student learning and teaching in a subject for which the teacher holds or is pursuing an endorsement; 3) involving the teacher applying in the classroom what was learned; and 4) aligned with state teaching standards and the needs of the teacher's district and students.**

**The State Department of Education should develop a list of activities that are acceptable forms of professional development. Such activities must first be connected to improving teaching or, secondarily, obtaining a cross-endorsement. At minimum, the list should include the following activities (in no particular order):**

- 1) formally mentoring one or more beginning teachers;**
  - 2) participating in or leading district or school level committees, initiatives, or seminars on any of the following topics: a) developing and/or teaching a new curriculum; b) assessing students (including development of assessments) and using assessment data to adjust instruction; c) differentiating instruction for diverse learners; and d) obtaining school accreditation;**
  - 3) completing coursework to obtain a cross-endorsement;**
  - 4) completing a research project that is focused on improving student learning;**
  - 5) serving as a teacher-in-residence at the State Department of Education; and**
  - 6) working on obtaining certification by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards.**
- 22. The State Department of Education, as part of its forthcoming initiative to produce new teacher evaluation standards, should require a teacher's professional development efforts be discussed and considered as part of the district's teacher evaluation process.**
- 23. Prior to adoption of the new professional development requirements, the State Department of Education – as part of its current stakeholders committee process – should begin discussing the framework of a proper oversight and approval mechanism for the new professional development system for teachers. The department should use the framework to fully develop its administrative structure for a professional development oversight and approval process.**

- 24. The State Department of Education should make a stronger effort to draw assessment panelists from the broader education community. The department should consider asking all principals and department chairs to: 1) apply to be panelists; and 2) suggest teachers and colleagues as panel nominees.**
- 25. The State Department of Education should convene small panels of educators every five years to re-evaluate whether the basic skills and content area assessments and assessment standards remain appropriate.**
- 26. The State Department of Education should continue its efforts in developing testing reciprocity with Massachusetts and New York and periodically report on its progress to the State Board of Education.**